

LEARNING FROM BOKO HARAM INSURGENCY: RECOMMENDATIONS ON AVERTING FUTURE SIMILAR VIOLENCE



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INTRODUCTION

Boko Haram has been a major challenge to Nigeria. It has devastated the north east region of the country, resulting in the killing of thousands of people, the internal displacement of millions of people as Internally displaced persons within the country and the emigration of millions others as refugees to neighboring countries and afar.

As we celebrate the military defeat of the insurgents we must learn the necessary lessons that will not only facilitate the reconstruction and rebuilding of those devastated communities, and the resettlement of the millions of IDPs but also how we can fortify our communities and make them resilient against such movements. Community resilience could help in explaining how communities have either successfully resisted or failed to resist and could thus offer us valuable lessons of what could be done to either rebuild the community resilience of the communities under threat or in fact have been overran by the insurgents

Community resilience is a key to the overall security strategy of any nation for in the end nations are as strong as the collective community resilience of their communities. It was from this perspective that CITAD with the support of the United States Institute for Peace (USIP) undertook a research on Community Resilience in the Context of Boko Haram. The objective of the research was to understand what factors make communities more resilient to violent action and atrocities perpetrated by terrorists in North East Nigeria and draw lessons on how to deepen resilience and enhance community capacity to bounce back from devastation. Specifically:

- 1) What forms of community readiness to anticipate risks exist in the community
- 2) Have the insurgents been able to penetrate and operate successfully in the community and if so, how did they do it?
- 3) What are the forms of mitigation of devastation of community life that are identifiable within the community?
- 4) What is the capacity of the community to bounce back after undergoing shock of devastation done by the insurgents?
- 5) What factors or variables explain higher capacity of certain communities to bounce back than others?

The project was part of the larger effort to find solution to the conflict as well as to prevent future occurrence of similar conflicts. It specifically sought to understand what makes communities to withstand and repels attacks by the insurgents or on the other hand to succumb and give them space operate. The study was thus to enable us to learn from these comparative experiences and be able to address what can make community resilience strong in the face of adversity or weakened it. By learning from experiences in the mobilization of community resilience to repel the insurgents, policy makers can seek to activate and empower those factors that enhance the capacity of communities to resist or to ensure that they do not provide space for such conflict to occur.

The research was conducted in over 16 communities across six states namely Adamawa, Bauchi, Bornu and Yobe States in North East and Kano and Jigawa States in the North West. This policy brief is the distillation of the key findings around the key factors that constitute community resilience and what can be done to activate them or to otherwise enhance them. It provides specific recommendations on what policy makers need to draw from in fortifying our communities to ensure that our communities are able to withstand or overcome adversity of any hue.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter contains a series of recommendations based on the findings of the research team. Already the challenges facing North East Nigeria are enormous and government and other actors are being overwhelmed with the task of reconstruction and massive malnutrition that is being reported. In making these recommendations, we urge for strategic cooperation and collaboration between many different stakeholders, both domestic and international, from the government, development partners, NGO sector, and local communities. The recommendations also require political will in order to mainstream these 'soft' actions recommended here into the 'hard' reconstruction process going on.

1. Strengthen Community Governance

Community resilience prospers when there is inclusivity and a robust community platform for active citizen participation and democratic decision-making. The absence of such platform in many communities led to their quick and brutal destruction by Boko Haram.

Government: Research has shown that sponsored security personnel are extremely inadequate to cover the ground of insurgency and other security threats and government is not likely to meet the need in many years to come given budgetary constraints. Yet, there several governments paid personnel in community like traditional rulers who do not have a clear job description. In addition there thousands of religious leaders, you and women associations that could be of help. Government needs to develop a realistic and mandatable job description for traditional rulers that include maintenance of peace and security or in the alternative amend the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) to provide for mayoralty. The present Local Government Council Structure is not effective in providing good democratic community governance, hence an additional structure is needed to provide the leadership type of hat is needed to manage the kind of complex problems that our communities today face.

All interventions and support should be guided by the global gender agenda encapsulated in the various instruments, conventions and summarized in the SDGs. This would entail promoting gender equity and women's voice as a core approach in all processes and systems while engaging men and boys in order to change traditional structures to become more empowering for women. This would entail addressing power and resources imbalances in the household and community, and transform gendered roles and responsibilities as well as encouraging men and boys to value the contributions and leadership of women.

Communities and Civil Society: The communities of the devastated North East cannot be reconstructed or Civil society has a duty to support these communities to develop the positive elements of community resilience like capacity for early warning and rapid response, conflict management and mitigation, participatory democracy and strategic planning. These elements can easily be mainstreamed to other reconstruction activities to ensure that insurgency should never reoccur or should it ever resurface, the response of communities will be different and fully resilient. Encourage women empowering spaces by supporting initiatives that empower women, strengthen their social capital as well as and develop networks to assist in social, personal, and professional development. This would involve also strengthening capacities of local women's organization and networks to promote and build community resilience.

International Partners: International partners in their support for reconstruction should sponsor community building and capacity to manage security and violence. They should also help communities provide jobs for at risk youth through community refurbishment projects, modern agriculture and local service provision. Ensure women and girls are included in the recovery and reconstruction process. Their inclusion should be informed by a gender analysis to ensure gender-responsive and gender-transformative interventions. They should be accorded full participate in the different programmes and roles from being members of committees making decisions to contractors, vendors and agents doing the actual labour. Women and girls should also be sensitized and included on all matters of their community particularly on policies and programmes.

2. Encourage Community policing

The policy of Community Policing has been adopted nearly a decade before, but is yet to be vigorously implemented. In the present circumstance where the security agencies are overstretched, this is the time to make the implementation of community policing a most urgent national priority.

Government: Rather duplicating security agencies or even licensing informal community security groups (known as vigilantes and hunters' Associations), budgetary support needs to be provided for the Nigeria Police For to commence implementing the community policing policy. Thousands of traditional rulers and religious leaders are ready partners for the policy.

Communities and civil society: The various informal security groups created by most communities in the North East are often constituted by unemployed youth who gradually grow into force for evil. Communities must encourage their mature citizens to volunteer their time to participate in work of these groups. Moreover, these informal groups need to be trained and strictly managed with provision for complaints against them by members of the community or victims of their actions. A situation where police officers control these informal security groups must be avoided to ensure that they are not used for other purposes.

International Partners: International partners should support the advocacy work of civil society to support Community policing and build peace security architectures with training, mentoring, and financial resources for conducting campaigns. International experts can also provide technical assistance to the security forces to fully operationalize the Community Policing Policy by sponsoring expertise and lessons learned from countries that have implemented such policy.

3. Framework to Curb Religious Extremism

Boko Haram exploited the existence of ungoverned spaces in our communities to incubate and cultivate its extremist religious ideology, because Local government was too far away from the problem, local elites were too unconcerned or complicit to intervene and local police officials were too intimidated by religious authority to challenge them. The country, the North East region and its citizens have paid dearly for these levels of neglect and lack of care.

Government: The United State Commission for International Religious Freedom since 2003 has been reporting that the main religious problem in Nigeria is the lack of enforcement of religious rights. Government needs to enforce the Constitutional provision that makes Nigeria a secular country and then protect religious rights and take action against religious impunity. In this regard, government need to introduce legislation to criminalise hate speech and must ensure that all preachers must belong to registered religious bodies and preaching that runs contrary to the Constitution or existing laws must be disallowed and perpetrators punished.

Community and Civil Society: Communities, supported by civil society must enact additional bye-laws at community level to regular religious activities, prohibit hate speech and ensure that such activities do not infringe on the rights of other religious groups and minorities. Civil society must also monitor hate speech and help communities develop mechanism to minimise such speech.

International Partners: Though religion is very sensitive in Nigeria, it is clear that the present state of things cannot be allowed to continue. International partners need to support development of capacity by Nigeria's National Human Rights Commission to monitor and protect religious rights. International partners should also help with examples of lessons learnt and policy samples on how to protect religious rights and enforce the law.

Government: Government response to particularly youth unemployment has proven ineffective. Apart from the fact that most of the skills the youth are being trained for have saturated markets and even if there were markets, such skills can never take them out of poverty. Government must be innovative in address these problems by providing skills that are beyond the basic, such that beneficiaries can really start up and compete with imported skills. Such areas are ICT which Nigeria youth have proved adept; modern agriculture particularly the production of exotic vegetables. Another big source of employment is the railways, which can provide a substantial number of jobs when link to agriculture. Proceeds from the war on Corruption should be deploying into this area so that it can reduce the level of social inequality.

Also, Peace building, Recovery and reconstruction process should take cognisance of gender-based differences in the efforts to address inequality. This would involve targeting provisions and services according to specific gender needs

Communities and Civil Society: Communities must not submit to the hopelessness that relates to youth unemployment. Reconstruction provides space to train youth in marketable services and skills. Even in the area of informal security groups, community can support the youth for providing that service and as they wait to find more enduring jobs. Dry season farming is another option that communities can engage their youth in with seed money or pumping machines. Levying wealthier community members and business operating in the community can easily fund the schemes. Including leverage and incorporate women's community building efforts by formally recognising their knowledge and expertise

International Partners: Working with civil society, International partners should establish more skill acquisition centres to provide economic empowerment programmes, skills building, and access to markets, credit, and other opportunities. The new communities that are being reconstructed will be lacking in many services. If well articulated, such skills can enable them to fill the gap and therefore reduce the inequality that presently exists. Support and interventions must be context and need specific. Working with women and men in the North East should involve different activities that address both women's and men's practical and strategic needs and specific to their contexts.

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ABOUT CITAD

CITAD (www.citad.org) is a capacity building civil society organization whose activities covers research, advocacy, training and publicity in all areas of ICTs. Its vision is; a knowledge-based democratic society free of hunger while its mission is; using ICTs to empower citizens for a just and knowledge-based society that is anchored on sustainable and balanced development.

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